

2 Held in Costa Rica Tell of Trip From U.S. to Join 'Contras'

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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, July 7.—Two foreigners being held here on weapons charges have given detailed accounts of how, they say, they volunteered to join anti-Sandinista forces, traveled to Central America from Florida aboard a plane loaded with weapons and took part in raids in Nicaragua.

Their accounts, given last week, suggested that members of the Costa Rican Civil and Rural Guard have provided intelligence and other help to anti-Sandinista groups operating along the Nicaraguan border.

The two men, Steven Carr, 26 years old, originally of Kingston, N.Y., and Peter Frederick Gilberry, 24, a British citizen, were among five foreigners captured by the Rural Guard on April 25. The three others, an American, another Briton and a Frenchman, declined to be interviewed.

Costa Rican officials took strong exception to the men's assertion that Costa Rican guardmen were collaborating with anti-Sandinista fighters, who are known as contras. "What the prisoners say is false," said the presidential spokesman, Arnoldo Vargas. "We do not permit

mercenaries to come to Costa Rica to fight against Nicaragua. If we were cooperating with the contras, these mercenaries would be free, but in fact they are in jail."

'Legitimate People'

Mr. Carr and Mr. Gilberry said they had volunteered to fight alongside the largest rebel army, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. In a telephone interview from Miami, the leader of the Democratic Force, Adolfo Calero, Purocarro, said the men "are legitimate people, volunteers who found their way to Central America in order to cooperate with the struggle against Communism." But he said he had no detailed knowledge of their activities or their stories.

Mr. Calero said the Democratic Force, which until now has operated almost exclusively from northern Nicaragua, had begun collaborating with other rebel groups along the Costa Rican border. Mr. Carr said he came to Costa Rica thus year with the help of Bruce Jones, an American circus performer who was later expelled from Costa Rica after an American magazine published an account describing his connections to the rebels. He said Mr. Jones introduced him to members of Brigade 2506, an anti-Communist group of Cuban exiles founded by participants in the abortive 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

A member of Brigade 2506, Raoul Masvidal, said in a telephone interview that his organization "has participated in efforts to raise money for the contras." But he said the brigade did not supply arms.

Mr. Gilberry said he had come to Central America with the help of an Alabama-based group, Civilian Military Assistance, which has helped other Americans seeking to fight the Sandinistas. He said he and a comrade, John Davies, a former British Army officer he had met in South Africa,

had volunteered to drive a truck to various depots around Miami to pick up arms and ammunition that Brigade 2506 had acquired and was donating to the anti-Sandinista cause.

He and Mr. Gilberry said the cargo included M-16 automatic rifles, 20-millimeter cannons, .30-caliber machine guns and 82-millimeter mortars. Tom Powley, who heads Civil Military Assistance, confirmed that he had helped Mr. Gilberry and Mr. Davies travel to Central America. "Their credentials looked good," he said. "We sent them on down," he said by telephone from Alabama. He denied having provided them with weapons.

Mr. Carr and Mr. Gilberry said that early on March 6 they and their three comrades took off from the airport in Fort Lauderdale aboard a chartered cargo plane laden with six tons of military supplies. "There were no customs checks, and nobody asked any questions," Mr. Carr said.

A spokesman for the Customs Service in Miami, Cliff Stultings, said that American law subjects all cargo flights leaving the United States to inspection. "Occasionally people circumvent the Customs law," he said. "It does happen."

A Walk Across the Border
The plane landed at the Ilopango military airfield in San Salvador, according to the men's account. From San Salvador, they said, the five flew to San José on a commercial flight.

The men said that on March 25 they walked across the border to a guerrilla camp about 500 yards inside Nicaragua. They said that there were 40 or 50 men at the camp and that they were being supplied by small planes flown from El Salvador by Salvadorean Air

Force. Both men said they had taken part in raids inside Nicaragua. Mr. Carr said he was part of a group that attacked a Sandinista base known as La Estrella on April 11, and Mr. Gilberry said he and Mr. Davies had led about a dozen men on missions he described as "wanton attacks."

The two men said they returned to their surprise, they said, the patrol arrested all five of them, along with nine Nicaraguans. There are believed to be divisions within the Costa Rican Government over how harshly to crack down on the rebels. In an interview, Minister of Public Security Benjamin Piza said he believed the five foreigners should be freed and deported because they were charged with "minor crimes." But after consulting with other officials, he reported that the case was in the hands of the judiciary and that he could do nothing because Costa Rica was a "seriously legalistic" country.

"I cannot guarantee that a couple of our men might not have been involved with the contras without the knowledge of the ministry," Mr. Piza said. "If we find out who they are, they will be re-tried immediately."

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